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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 000608

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SUBJECT: THAI MFA AND THE NORTH KOREAN IN VIENTIANE

REF: VIENTIANE 97

Classified By: DCM Alexander A. Arvizu. Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

1. (C) On January 24, Polcouns sought clarifications regarding the Royal Thai Government (RTG) positions in the matter of An Kyong-Su, the North Korean asylum seeker in Embassy Vientiane, from MFA's Paisit Boonparlit, Director for Political Affairs in the Americas Department, and Suraphan Boonyamanop, Director for Division IV (Indonesia, Korea, E. Timor and Mongolia) in the East Asia Department.

2. (C) Both officials confirmed that the basic RTG stance -- elaborated by East Asia Director General Nopadol Gunavibool last week, and reiterated to the Ambassador by Permanent Secretary Krit Garnjana-Goochorn -- remains: a) openness to

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transit of An through Thailand by air via Don Muang airport (as long as he is escorted and onward bound, and even if he lacks documents); and b) opposition to his entering Thailand by land.

3. (C) Polcouns asked whether, if the air option became possible, the RTG would allow An to stay in Don Muang transit for several days for processing by UNHCR and the South Korean Embassy. He also asked whether, if An were to have his South Korean travel documents in hand, Thailand would allow him entry from Laos by land as a South Korean.

4. (C) Paisit, who has only marginal responsibilities in this case, responded that he would pass the questions on to the East Asia Department which is handling the case for senior-level MFA officials. Interestingly, he inquired whether the U.S. had considered flying An out of Laos aboard the DAO C-12 to a military airport in Thailand. Surprised to hear this idea, which first surfaced with Embassy Vientiane (reftel), floated by an MFA official, Polcouns asked whether the RTG would agree to such an arrangement. Paisit said he did not know, but speculating on a personal basis, if he read the thinking of his colleagues correctly, it might be an option.

5. (C) Suraphan said he would discuss Polcouns' two questions with DG Nopadol (the key working level official on this case, who was not available) and other officials. He asked what we had in mind by "several days" for processing in an airport transit, and was told that it probably would require two full days. On the second scenario of An crossing the border documented as a South Korean, Suraphan said that he imagined our intention would be to move him as quickly as possible to Bangkok airport. Without conceding agreement to a land entry, Suraphan then outlined that the fastest method would be to cross by land to Nong Khai, travel by car 55 kilometers to Udon airport, and then take one of many Udon-Bangkok daily scheduled flights. Polcouns did not raise Paisit's C-12 idea with Suraphan.

6. (C) Suraphan said he had been in touch earlier January 24 with the South Korean Embassy in Bangkok and had been told that their policy was to have verification from a "third party" of An's North Korean identity and determination from that third party that he wanted to go to South Korea. Polcouns explained in detail that both requirements had been amply met, although UNHCR had not specifically been able to interview An because the Lao government will not permit them to enter Laos. Suraphan also said that he had lunched with the Lao Ambassador, who claimed not to know anything about the matter. Suraphan said he urged the Ambassador to contact the Lao MFA and seek flexibility on departure of An by commercial air to Bangkok for onward travel.

7. (C) Comment: The Thai are holding fast to their basic positions on An, but clearly have been actively staying on top of developments and seem to be thinking about ways to resolve the current impasse. End Comment.

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